House Unit Pursuing 'New Leads' Into Kennedy, King Deaths

WASHINGTON (AP) — A special House investigating committee said Friday it is looking "into new and previously unpursued leads" in the assassinations of President John FF. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Two examples, previously disclosed, were cited in the committee's progress report. Rep. Thomas N. Downing (D-Va.), the committee chairman, said they were regarded as "highly significant."

He said they are being evaluated, but he emphasized, as did other committee members and chief counsel Richard A. Sprague, it is far too early to reach any conclusions.

The 26-page report was largely a plea the committee be continued by the new Congress and its request for $6.5 million be approved.

"This is not a spectacular report, full of revelations," Downing said at a news conference. "There are no bombshells in it."

THE HOUSE voted to create the committee last September, but the panel will go out of existence unless the House in the incoming 95th Congress votes to recreate it.

As new evidence, the committee cited a statement attributed to an unidentified witness that alleged King assassin James Earl Ray had told him he was contacted in Europe by "another person from whom he received further instructions to aid in his continuing flight."

The report said this witness had never been interviewed before by any investigative agency.

Sprague, asked about this, said the committee is trying to determine how credible the witness is.

THE COMMITTEE report, in its other example of new leads, said staff investigators had been sent to Mexico to interview witnesses about statements made there by Lee Harvey Oswald within 60 days of President Kennedy's assassination.

"These witnesses had never been sought out before by any investigative body, notwithstanding the fact they had important information" about Oswald's statements, the report said.

The report said on November 26, "committee staff questioned extensively an ex-CIA agent regarding his personal knowledge of conversations between Lee Harvey Oswald and personnel within the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City."

IN RESPONSE to questions, Sprague said the CIA had not disclosed to the FBI and other agencies Oswald's desire to go to Russia and Cuba. He said the information had been left out by the CIA — not altered in the original CIA document.

Sprague said one question was what the other agencies would have done if they had received the information. But he said the primary question was why a decision was made "not to include the information in materials forwarded to the FBI and other agencies when it had been regarded as important enought to put in the communication sent by the CIA from Mexico City to headquarters here."

The report said "the passage of time has not healed the national trauma caused" by the assassination of Kennedy in Dallas on November 23, 1963, and of King in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

IN THE ensuing years, "old doubts have remained and new disturbing questions have been raised as additional evidence has come to light," it said.

Downing said there are "hundreds and hundreds of unanswered questions" but the basic one is whether a conspiracy was involved in either or both assassinations.

The Warren Commission found 12 years ago that Oswald was the sole assassin of Kennedy. Ray pleaded guilty to killing King, although he told the court he did not agree with the statement by the prosecution and his own defense attorney that there was no conspiracy involved.

Ray reportedly has written a letter to the House committee, without his lawyer's consent, offering to testify and saying he was framed by the FBI and local police.